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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the history of literacy training in Romania through the pretotalitarian period (1890-1945), the totalitarian period (1945-1989), and the posttotalitarian period (1989-present). Current literacy development efforts face many challenges including the facts that 592 classrooms do not have indoor plumbing, that more than 1,700 teaching positions in village and commune schools are held by individuals without specialized education, and that 60 percent of functional illiterates live in rural areas. An evaluation of rural literacy training shows that, during the most difficult stage of totalitarianism (1980-1989), great strides were made, including establishing a school in every village, free education for all, access to cultural activities and written information, original cultural productions, and mass cultural demonstrations. However, the dictatorship controlled the content of written and visual communication, practiced censorship, and imposed codes of the Ruling Power through propaganda that became known as "gobbledygook." Objectives for a posttotalitarian rural literacy training program include abandoning the idea that only schools can provide literacy training; discovering community-based methods and encouraging nongovernmental agencies to launch literacy projects; producing tools to raise awareness of functional illiteracy in Romania; making use of projects and programs established by other agencies for the education of women and youth and for training; and enlarging the field of literacy training to include cultural minorities. Projects in progress include developing a rural university, a wide scale evaluation of the human and material resources in rural areas, and the establishment of a national network of facilitators for rural areas. (LP)

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Chapter 13
FUNCTIONAL LITERACY IN ROMANIA — BETWEEN MYTH & REALITY

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THE MEANING OF LANGUAGE

The text that follows is intended as an essay on the contradictory history of literacy training in Romania (during the period preceding and the period following 1989) and some of the objectives, problems and desired results of literacy training projects for development in rural areas.

The study's presentation in three parts, pre-totalitarian period, totalitarian period and post-totalitarian period, is justified, on one hand, by the need to emphasize the relationship that should exist between traditions and current projects. On the other hand, we have tried to point out current literacy problems in rural areas based on the idea that, during the totalitarian period, literacy really a "logocracy", a sub-system of the Ruling Power through which it imposed the codes, symbols and structures of "communist literacy".

We have tried to suggest new answers to questions raised about literacy research and action programs, such as: "What could be more normal than literacy training that intends, according to its objectives, to be something other than evangelism through language or a false social catalyst that is much too diluted to trigger the radical transformations it proposes?" The answers come only through understanding what language has meant in countries that have experienced totalitarianism: not so much a way of communicating, understanding, arguing and philosophizing but rather, a subtle, external form of manipulation designed to contaminate all messages by reducing them to a single code: that intended by the Ruling Power.

We have adopted the recognized meaning of "consciousness-raising",

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because it fits the objectives proposed and our way of thinking. In Romania's case, literacy has to fulfill a training rather than an information function, because it is more than a sum of basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic). It is a way of raising consciousness of a social and cultural heritage that must be mobilized and revitalized. Enlightened (participative, involved) literacy training must become a basic framework for cultural development in rural areas, as much an expression of the quality of new relationships between the individual and the community as the starting point for the individual autonomy that is necessary for Romania to consciously find a place in the outside world, to communicate with self or others, to participate more fully in social life. The overall purpose, in a word, is liberation, in its most generous sense.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Today, rural areas are obsessed with their own stagnation. Although they want to return (perhaps too quickly) to tranquillity, they do not have the means. In this social milieu, transition is difficult and painful. Peasants are thrust into a new role, that of farmer or owner, forced to deal with the new mechanisms of the market economy and expected to translate all their problems into prosperity or, at least, economic growth.

Economic growth, however, has to be questioned if rural areas are to represent anything more than just a preservation of the status quo, maintaining privileges and submitting peasants to new slogans imposed for political reasons that have not been explained to them. Real development includes becoming aware and experiencing what individuals can achieve in the general historical and community setting, when they have the opportunity to express themselves creatively according to their aptitudes, beliefs and personal preferences, and when society accepts their individual uniqueness, following models that enable personal and communal transformation. Development also means the opportunity to participate in every aspect of public and private life, allowing each individual the right to experience a conscious relationship with self and with the environment.

Rural areas, moreover, should not be considered a blank page that can be filled with new codes and rousing messages. No political authority (party or organization) can assume the role of writing and rewriting the history of literacy in the same terms as in the past. The peasants have negative experiences from the past and are very sceptical about new revolutionary action taken at their expense.

What, then, are the risks of too rapid a transition? First, there is moral crisis, lack of confidence in the new activism imposed, passivity, and/or a refusal to participate in community life — then isolation, a safe strategy in difficult times. The peasants have already learned the mechanisms of social protection by isolating themselves within the confines of their village or even their own home.

The village can easily fall prey to cultural pollution by mass media in unfair competition with authentic rural values, yielding disastrous effects.

Raising consciousness about change can compensate for the speed of negative change. What models are acceptable? What are the critical evaluation criteria for integrating contemporary urban models? What methods are there for renewing rural areas, and who are the social players (individuals, groups, organizations) ready to mobilize their resources? If an infrastructure or information structure exists, how can it assist the goals of literacy training?

It would be easy to believe that such an exalted purpose could only be unanimously accepted and recognized as an unquestionable national priority. Yet, the literacy training problem is still evaded, in post-totalitarian Romania, either by silence or by reducing it to a sum of insignificant, anachronistic problems.

Politicians do not consider illiteracy a real problem in rural areas, although there are concerns about other problems there (privatization, repossession by former landowners, production associations and so on). When, in spite of everything, literacy training is not forgotten, it is presented as an issue from the past or one that exists only for the aged.

Without question, however, 1989 was a year of profound change. The availability of information sparked an information explosion in reaction to the suppression of information by the past regime. For the moment, it finds expression in rural areas simply as an interest in information. But the time will come when peasants will express their need for access to information, and we must be prepared for that day.

The Option of Literacy Training

There are many "enthusiasts" who consider cultural development an invention of cultural facilitators/"agitators". Such enthusiasts cite statistics to show that it is impossible to raise the problem of illiteracy in rural areas. Here are some of the data:

- There are 11,307 schools in rural areas as opposed to only 2,540 in urban areas.
- There are 12,786 classrooms in rural areas and only 3,298 in urban areas.
- In every village or commune, there is a cultural centre, library and movie theatre.
- Out of a total of 157,838 students, 35,189 came from rural areas (in 1992).

To moderate the enthusiasm, we could cite other data. The number of schools in rural areas is approximately equal to the number of classrooms, because the schools are so small and old; 592 classrooms do not have indoor plumbing. More than 1,700 teaching positions in village and commune schools are held by individuals without specialized education, secondary school graduates. Most cultural centres have been transformed into restaurants, and many libraries are

unusable, abandoned or lack readers. A survey conducted in three categories of populations at risk showed 15% were functional illiterates; 60% of them were from rural areas.

These figures reveal facts that we consider serious; inequalities between urban and rural areas are becoming more marked. Only the more cultured and better informed take advantage of expanded cultural dissemination: youth and city dwellers. Underprivileged social groups remain marginal with respect to culture.

In response to a radio survey in 1992, which was called "Your opinion about your village", we received hundreds of letters from young people in rural areas; the results reinforced the observations already made. In rural areas, there is significant interest in cultural activities (including traditional ones). The statement of a young girl, 23 years old, who lives in an isolated village in the Arad district is a moving example:

> I do not know why there is such indifference toward cultural life in my village, an indifference that seems to include everyone, toward the pollution of popular music and the lack of theatrical performances. Only newspapers with political content, no cultural magazines reach here... Although I work in a village school, I cannot say that there is anyone to talk to about books. All the discussions are... political! Sometimes I feel like an intruder in my own village. Our grandmother left us grandchildren all kinds of things she made with her own hands, but I could not say that I have tried to learn anything about what could be called "folklore".

Due to indifference, we are witnessing the slow death of popular culture, the death of a system of references, customs and beliefs marked by religion, folklore. Through songs, images, lay or religious holidays that gave meaning to life events, the system played the protective role of a basic matrix necessary for osmosis between individual and milieu. Popular culture has now left a vacuum that could well be filled by conflict and aggressiveness.

On that basis, we could formulate the fundamental objectives for enlightened literacy training based on an idea expressed in a study of education system reform in Romania:

> Transition from a totalitarian to a democratic society is not possible solely by a change of government, but rather by changes in skills, mentality, attitudes, social relationships and daily behaviour. As a result, although political and economic decisions are often in the foreground, transition is actually essentially social, psychological and moral in nature... It is obvious that transition is an educational process of national scope.[1]

The general objectives of functional literacy training in rural areas could therefore be specified as follows:

- restoring traditional institutions in Romanian villages (school, church, library, cultural centre, movie theatre, museum) and other activities that are cyclical or devoted to local events (social gatherings, agricultural holidays, activities for single youth and so on) for the purposes of literacy training;
- training specialized literacy facilitators for rural areas and preparing (mobilizing) individuals targeted so that they participate in their own literacy training; learning new linguistic codes and using critically communication channels;
- motivating each individual to participate in community life as a social player; mobilizing local groups (intellectuals, for example) and other individuals who are still tied to rural areas; discovering specific methods of inter-regional organization based on the theme of local solidarity among villages that have common problems.

It is, therefore, a matter of an overall view of literacy training and, implicitly, an overall view of the individual attaining literacy: "A literate person must not only be able to read, write and count, but must, above all, be an informed and civilized citizen... Literacy represents more than reading, writing and arithmetic skills. It is not a simple skill but a basic human right.[2]"

In spite of past destructive policies of natural, social, cultural and sacred space, rural areas have remained opposed to the compulsory codes of the Ruling Power, thanks to humour and hardy traditions. There is still acceptance in rural areas of the idea of social solidarity through culture and literacy training.

Initial Action

Here are some forms of action that we consider necessary for literacy training programs:

a) Preparing the matrix for participative literacy training, through cultural development in rural areas, based on the principle that the rural population is willing to participate in community life, but prevented from doing so by material or social conditions. The means must be found to distance the idea of cultural development from the conditioned reflexes that link it to socialism: to overcome centralizing tendencies and encourage local initiative in selecting and training facilitators. We intend to launch a consciousness-raising campaign for representatives of local authority, individuals who represent rural institutions and intellectuals, in order to recruit literacy program facilitators.

b) Encouraging change in cultural institutions through innovation or simply by adapting their objectives to consciousness-raising objectives. This involves restoring traditional cultural institutions that are still functioning (museums, libraries, cultural centres) by giving them new meaning corresponding to current needs.

Cultural centres, experiencing decline, should not make us forget that they were created as institutions for popular education. Material and human resources will be required to recreate this.

We will evaluate the real situation, with the co-operation of representatives of local administration, mayors and prefects. Within the context of the general program of education reform, our institute aims to create pilot centres to apply education reform programs (including rural areas) and to involve local resources in research and development programs.

c) Evaluating new partners. The State cannot bear the financial burden of supporting reform programs without participation by other agencies and associations. Once the idea of literacy training is recognized as a priority for contemporary Romanian society, we will be able to count on the support of several non-governmental institutions and even the private sector.

This approach to enlightened literacy training could be compared to a new

flourishing of the cultural revolution, in contrast to what is called traditional literacy training. Let us clarify that active literacy training does not, in itself, aim to transform the village social and economic system, but rather to provide peasants with the means for civilization (and not politicization) enabling them to become increasingly capable of assuming responsibilities toward their community.

LITERACY TRAINING: FROM ITS REAL TRADITIONS TO MANIPULATING CODES

The Pre-totalitarian Period (1890-1945)

Before 1945, Romania had toward adult education the same concerns as other European countries. To cite only a few examples:

a) Between 1893 and 1945, education legislation recognized literacy as the responsibility of the schools and literacy training in rural areas as a duty of the rural community. There were school-based programs for adults, just as there were in the same period, in the first basic education programs, for example in the United States, Canada and Portugal.[3] Such programs were aimed at the undereducated and their reintegration into occupational and social life.

The trend in Romania was progressive for the times: a concern for special programs, organized directly in the villages within specific institutional structures (the army, convents, prisons) and relying on local resources for educators and funding.

b) Detailed statistical data gathered either by census or by special surveys also show that there was interest in literacy training between 1899 and 1932. Such data are missing in statistics after 1945, which we perceive either as a lack of interest in the problem or as an evasion of a reality that reflected poorly on the "success of socialism". We were supposed to conclude that the illiteracy rates of 67.4% (1912) and 35.1% (1932) in rural areas had disappeared thanks to the two-year socialist literacy campaign (1948 to 1950). After 1950, illiteracy indicators are lacking; it was to be taken as a given that socialist society had succeeded, in only two years, in eradicating a problem that arose from a system of social inequalities (capitalism), and thus affirming its superiority.

c) Sociological studies of rural areas were numerous in that period; specialists in the field (I. Ivanescu, G.G. Antonescu, Simion Mehedinti, Stanciu Stoian, P.P. Negulescu, Dimitrie Gusti, Traian Herseni) devoted their studies to rural areas and to the problem of eliminating illiteracy. Dimitrie Gusti's scientific activity is remarkable; he undertook a literacy campaign in 54 Romanian villages, with only the help of his students, applying his sociological monograph method, which could be called action research before its time. His effort to create a museum of the Romanian village, in Bucharest, is also remarkable. Dimitrie Gusti conducted an extremely relevant analysis of categories of illiteracy and became one of the promoters of the rural university. In 1928, he described the goals of the rural university in these terms:

> "We must create a new ethos, raise a new level of consciousness and conviction: the peasants' belief in their peasant mission and the consciousness of their responsibility to their village and to the State to which they belong, their attachment to their village and to their land — those are the objectives of a post-secondary school in the rural milieu!"[4]

The concern for rural areas can be considered remarkable. The various forms of literacy training adapted for different environments and genders and instituted in adult education programs reveals the diverse needs of rural areas and the interest the State and intellectuals had in resolving a problem they considered crucial. Just as remarkable, the rural university projects sought to improve the peasants' awareness and to renew traditions of popular medicine, agriculture and folklore. Many of these projects would be worth fulfilling.

The Totalitarian Period (1945-1989)

The Facts

After 1948 (the year of the first socialist education reform act), the illiteracy problem was declared the fault of the former regime and even used to explain its failures. The authorities declared a campaign of forced literacy training (in the same way they had undertaken other campaigns for co-operatization in agriculture, industrialization, expropriation) for a period of two years. Subsequently, illiteracy was completely ignored. But the literacy training campaign proved to be a resounding success for other, more veiled, reasons and produced the first functional illiterates:

> After two years of studies in an educational centre, two years of secondary school and three or more years of higher education (in worker universities), a total illiterate could become a "specialist" in problems of the economy, society or culture.[5]

This marked the appearance of new specialists in a new profession, that of revolutionary. Thus began the destruction of intellectuals and the Romanian elite. A subtle and diabolical process of separating facts from the mystification of facts also began.

During the "golden age of communism", rural areas underwent heavy losses. First, they lost the intellectuals who were considered dangerous, well-to-do bourgeois. They became prisoners in political prisons and forced labour camps built for utopic industrial purposes. The destruction of peasant property began, in the hopes of actually destroying the natural relationship with the land through agriculture co-operatization campaigns that followed several so-called "agrarian revolutions". Soon Romanian villages had to endure another triumphal campaign — industrialization. The youth began to leave the villages to work in industrial mammoths that swallowed underqualified workers.

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The ongoing revolution and its sacrifices

One of the most prevalent phrases in the past regime was "ongoing revolution", which contaminated many other concepts. Consciousness became "revolutionary", as did thought, history, activity, work. Paradoxically, despite the enthusiasm that was also supposed to accompany the underlying realities, individuals became increasingly passive toward change, because they were told that all their sacrifice was to further the "revolutionary values" they were meant to endorse.

As for the peasants, they were able to resist the pressures thanks to their deeply embedded roots in tradition. Perhaps it was what Fernand Braudel referred to as "the long term" or just the peasants' natural, common-sense loyalty to their own values. In any case, they resisted the pressure but became less communicative and less interested in participating in social life. In the villages today, the traces of post-revolutionary sadness are still evident on the faces of many of the elderly inhabitants.

Control and falsification

The Ruling Power of the former regime soon understood the importance of communication in society. It therefore decided to control the content of written and visual communication, finding oral communication harder to control and preferring to let it function as a release valve in case of potential conflicts. The Ruling Power thus meticulously considered and applied a program for a new kind of literacy training whose objective was to create the ability to understand and to communicate only the falsified codes imposed by the Ruling Power, by inventing a specific mechanism that could be called "control by falsification".

In rural areas, literacy training was conducted specifically through new or socialist folklore, an expression of the joy of socialist living, used to communicate the total harmony that exists between traditional and socialist values (such as collectivizing land, for example, or hatred of the rich and the exploiters) and to give due thanks to the Party and its leader. We had to endure "folkloric" creations transformed into songs or deformed poems of the genre: "Maple leaf and cabbage leaf / Come see me, my fine young wolf / If you take me as your wife / my co-op'rative's your life."[6]

Now it is impossible to imagine the peasants who created folklore that was either sober or full of humour, but always remarkably connected to their essential themes (the relationship between their feelings and nature, the sacrifice required for any real achievement, love) humming a song about collectivization or love for the Party. There were some individuals willing to present that kind of "creation" (that nobody listened to) on radio or television, given that the purpose of the Ruling Power was clearly to falsify a means of

communication by very strict control of it.

The most useful tool for information control was systematic and strenuous censorship. Nothing that might threaten the dictatorship could be broadcast. Words that expressed fear, criticism of the prosperous socialist regime or simply meanings that the dictators did not understand (being themselves suspected of illiteracy) were cut out and locked up in the "prison for words".[7] Partial banning, requiring the author to substitute and compromise, was more subtle. Creative writers adopted various attitudes and strategies to survive the slow, insidious war of attrition. They adopted a form of literacy that could be called "survival literacy". They used any and all means to thwart Party vigilance: sacrificing part of their creation, adopting a bookish style, of a different time, glorifying nationalism (a subject greatly prized by the authorities).

In our projects for rural areas, we must first recognize the existence of certain cognitive structures (for understanding written text) that could not be wiped out by the political changes of 1989, after 50 years of totalitarianism. While the peasants soon learned social complicity, all their tools for duplicity changed over time into behaviour: reserve, passivity and little interest in what happens beyond their immediate concerns or their community's. The premise that they could simply and rapidly learn all that society asked them to learn is not very plausible without sustained and organized literacy training.

The mirage of gobbledygook

Communist speeches habituated us to a certain language that has been called "gobbledygook". Communist Party reports, lectures, and debates were full of technical details, figures, percentages, forecasts and indicators that bore no relationship to reality. The more technical and filled with stirring slogans the speeches were, the less credible and more ridiculous they were. The purpose of the speeches, however, was not so much to falsify data as to falsify communication and thought.

Gobbledygook was a tool for regulating interaction between individual and Party and between individuals, a real mental battle where: "Only the Party is right and can tell the whole truth. What it cannot express does not exist." Such axioms, which governed the literacy training strategies imposed by the Ruling Power, gradually caused a contagious disease of thought that attacked any attempt at opposition.

Gobbledygook was also another tool for imposing the codes of the Ruling Power: for building a standardized structure and criteria based on populist attitudes using certain conditioned linguistic reflexes. All institutions were mobilized in the fight against the mind: the press, school, radio and television, movies, theatre. They were all to become sources of collective suggestion that were then to create individual beliefs, followed by collective beliefs.

As an example of the contagious disease of suggestibility inflicted by

The Consequences

An ageing rural population, homes and families abandoned along with popular costumes, traditions, community models, languages and symbols of the rural world... Where were the advantages? Impersonal apartments, frustrating for peasants who were accustomed to a certain kind of communication: direct, oral, face to face, which played a specific role in social control; underemployment, alienation in the workplace, new models for social and cultural relationship that would lead, in short, to social anomie.

Those who could not completely adapt to urban life chose another solution: commuting between the city (or place of work) and the village (no longer serving any function other than dormitory). But they made the worst choice; rootlessness, instability, minimal time for reflection and development of critical opinions. Those who could not adjust became victims of literacy training imposed by the Ruling Power much more rapidly than those who chose total urbanization.

Other effects of revolutionary policies struck straight at the villages: indirectly, through the introduction of some polluting but grandiose industrial schemes on village land and, directly, as a result of a policy of "land systematization" that sought to transform villages into some kind of mutant hybrid known as "agro-industrial centres". The consequences are still visible: pollution, villages completely demolished or moved and the attendant results of that destruction. The villages around the city of Copsa Mica are a good example; a factory for the production of chemical substances was built there, and the vegetation and forests were practically totally destroyed. Another example is the small village of Ada-Kalech where Romanians and Turkish minorities used to peacefully co-exist; it was completely razed to make room for a hydro-electric station. Now, only a small museum remains, with picturesque images of the past, and a few ageing people, who speak about their former home with tears in their eyes.

An evaluation of rural literacy training shows that, during the most difficult stage of totalitarianism (1980 to 1989), results were spectacular. There was a school in every village, no illiteracy, free education for all, access to cultural activities and written information, original cultural productions, mass cultural demonstrations and so on. But over those great benefits and achievements hovered an amusing question that transformed all that prosperity into a paradox: How do we explain that, under capitalism, where it is worse, it is better, and, under socialism, where it is better, it is actually worse?

Communism's Mystifications

In order to assess the extent of the problem, we propose to highlight not only the linguistic and cultural aspects of literacy training, but, in particular, the

socio-political and psychological implications of a policy based on overturning the rural traditions of marginalized peasants whose survival depended on an oral culture that they constantly had to defend against mystifications.

School for all and literacy training in school

One of the strongest indoctrination resources was the school, which soon became the only source of literacy training. Schools in rural areas were transformed into agro-industrial schools where basic education was largely neglected. There was a profound incompatibility between the very advanced level of the curriculum and the practical need to simplify knowledge for the purpose of making it operational. As a result, students were not given a good understanding of facts and were given even less instruction in basic skills (writing, reading, arithmetic).

Compulsory schooling up to 16 years of age, which should have thrust Romania into the ranks of the world's developed countries, had unexpected pernicious results: lack of objective selection and promotion criteria, many failures and dropouts, an increase in juvenile delinquency.

A teacher of Romanian who now works in a small country school made this edifying statement:

> I was obliged to announce incorrect percentages for the promotion of students to higher levels because, if I had students who had to redo the material I was teaching, I was considered a bad teacher, or, worse, an enemy of Party policy. In addition, my students were obliged to study politicized, so-called literary texts during class time and to read real literary works that I recommended outside school, almost with the feeling of committing a crime. I realize that I was one of the first to teach them the techniques of duplicity, but it was the only way to survive.

The purpose of literacy training based in the school was, in fact, the materialization of a myth. The myth of the "new human being" was, however, the prototype of the ordinary person, normal to the point of losing his or her own individuality. This myth cast a utopian light on all educational, cultural and political activity, becoming the most dogmatic and populist slogan of the time. The "person with multilateral training in all fields of activity" was, in reality, the materialization of the "superman" myth as opposed to the Promethean "man in revolt".

This "evil rewriting of man" wanted all spiritual concerns to be repressed in favour of a dogmatic and ultra-pragmatic approach, intending to create a prototype of an animal-like person, with a dormant conscience and primal concerns.

In spite of this situation, the peasants continued to live, love, learn, create. The Ruling Power proved incapable of evaluating their ability to survive, to endure suffering, injustice, the absurd. But peasants began abandoning their potential for authentic creation.

gobbledygook, here is a typical text entitled "To achieve the precious ideals of our nation", signed by the chairperson of a village agricultural co-operative:

> We agricultural workers are convinced that after the last few years of building socialism, and, in particular, after the IX Congress, which began a period of great change in the history of Romanian agriculture, we workers of the land have been through an intense process of great transformation and revolutionary change. First of all, there is the significant fact of ever-increasing growth in agricultural production made possible by learning the "art of working the land" and the great investment made in agriculture.... The peasants' quality of life has improved in keeping with the benefits of hard work, increasingly modern and effective, based on the solid foundation of the "new quality" principle.... I want to thank our Secretary General of the Communist Party for the efforts made... for the emancipation and civilization of the villages of Romania, for the life the peasants lead, for their conditions of work, for the future of humanity."[8]

We believe that it will not be possible to implement a program of democratization without reconstructing the language in real conditions of contemporary rural life.

Humour as a source of survival for oral literacy

In contrast to this sombre picture, the dictatorship period is full of humorous creations (anecdotes, songs, poems and so on). This proliferation of oral expression could be explained as an antidote to official imposed literacy. In fact, the anecdote has its roots in popular tales that are very short, joyous and conclude with a moral. In our case, the moral purpose of these tales has been exchanged for finding release and responding to official propoganda.

The most representative illustration of the role of humour in rural culture and social psychology is found in the cemetery of laughter. In the little village of Sapinta in the Maramures region, there is a crazy, provocative cemetery, full of grotesque images, with epitaphs written as humorous, rhyming chronicles of the personality and life of the deceased, an iconoclastic cemetery.

Humour has reinforced the codes of the sub-text, representing another way to survive by laughing at our unhappiness (grin and bear it). The purposes of propaganda were subtle enough to allow the oral channels to function, while allowing the Ruling Power to take advantage of a mutually accepted deceitful atmosphere. How could it have lied so blatantly, if there had not been a natural setting for lies? In the atmosphere of constant lies, it wisely accepted humour as a generously offered illusion, the illusion that we could laugh at the Ruling Power. We thus participated not only in the devaluation of the truth, but also in the depreciation of the aspiration to know the truth.

THE POST - TOTALITARIAN PERIOD (AFTER 1989)

The Romanian Rural Environment

In Romania, the rural area represents more than a group of villages and communes. It is a world that includes about 2,688 administrative units and over 10,839,761 inhabitants (46.8% of the Romanian population), where the main occupations are agriculture (and related fields), light industry, business and services.

Today, there are no "empty" rural regions because the Real Property Act (no. 18 /1991) re-established the relationship between the peasants and their land, thus allowing the urban population to repossess and work the land again. Furthermore, the rate of unemployment (8.4% nationally) has brought about an increase in migration from urban to rural areas.

We cannot speak of homogeneity in the rural area; it extends, very evenly divided, between regions of plains, hills and mountains. Differences in geographic location have brought differences in economic and cultural development. There are also definite differences between the regions that were co-operatized and those that were not in terms of mentality, attitudes and community spirit. (In the hill and mountain regions, the land remained the property of the peasant.) In the regions that were not co- operatized, cultural development and private initiative was much greater, and cultural pollution was minimal. (The Maramures and Bucovina regions are good examples.)

There are regions inhabited by minority communities (Hungarian, German, Serb, Turk, Romany and so on) that form relatively compact cultural zones where they speak their mother tongue and want to preserve their particular cultural and occupational traditions and to develop their own language with the help of educational and para-educational institutions.

The New "Conditional Dictatorship"

In the three years following the removal of the dictatorship, Romanian society has accepted a widely used, but still misunderstood, concept: transition. For the peasants, the meaning of that concept is not clear: does it mean crisis, development, restructuring? Without some clarification (information about the problems as well as the real possibilities for coming out of the crisis), there is no way to convince the peasants that they can make plans for the future, for a new life. Projects for development and plans to motivate people to get involved in community life cannot be entertained without creating a stable foundation. How could we consider building projects based on the fragile structures of the

new conditional dictatorship?

What methods are there for informing rural areas? First of all, radio and television are oral literacy resources that are often criticized for their partisanship. (They are national networks.) Then, there are newspapers, periodicals, books and magazines; although in 1991, there were 3,869 new books, 435 magazines and over 200 newspapers and periodicals published, only 10% of them reached rural areas. So written information is lacking as a resource to raise consciousness about change.

The cultural infrastructure itself is poorly utilized. In 1991, there were 2,585 cultural centres with 4,862 rural branches, but they are still underused and undervalued as information tools today.

The Problems of Informal Education

Because rural areas were bombarded by the new popular culture, and because popular creators were obliged to endure social activism and the pressure, at any cost, to be creators (of new agriculture, new relationships or new folklore), the peasants are now very wary of any cultural development initiative outside traditional institutions. As a result, it will be very difficult to choose informal methods (generally used in literacy training programs) and to avoid using voluntary facilitators (who had been facilitators under the old regime) who might rediscover their taste for outmoded activism.

We plan to involve the Church in our projects, because it once represented a means of escape into a sacred space. Sacred rituals were special occasions for participation in community life, and the only form of civic instruction tacitly opposed to totalitarian rule was found in religious education.

Today, religious education could constitute a form of literacy training suited to rural areas that would not give the peasants the impression of coming from the outside, because it is familiar to them. However, here again it could be said that there is a crisis of confidence as some members of the Church compromised with the Ruling Power in the past (and have retained important positions in society), and also because there is a profusion of religious rituals on television. Many of them seem to have political rather than religious purposes. As a result, there are criticisms and controversies about the role of the Church in society and, in particular, about its educational mission. If we want to associate the Church in literacy training (a role it played before 1945), we have to start with some projects and measures aimed at the Church itself.

The New Gobbledygook

Immediately after the events of December 1989, we thought it would be enough to burn all the communist books and speeches for gobbledygook to be

forgotten. But totalitarian reflexes had been solidly entrenched and led to a new gobbledygook that uses new terms but with the same purpose: **communication without content**, particularly when it comes to official explanations of a crisis. Some members of Parliament adopted a "gobbledygook style", as it were, a baroque style consisting of long jingoistic speeches and journalistic language closely resembling the language used in the past by those who humbly served the Ruling Power.

For example, the following is an excerpt from an article on the problem of introducing religious instruction into primary schools, entitled "An opinion on anticonstitutional, anachronistic procedures":

> How could the more gifted students, the intellectuals, with their atheistic, materialistic and scientific convictions, be forced to assimilate religious beliefs that clearly contradict scientific data on nature and society and generally contradict the most elementary logic, and to accept the basic commandment of any religion, which is to believe without questioning.[9]

This resembles a paragraph from a manual on scientific socialism. It is not difficult to recognize the gobbledygook style, which serves here to express the indignation of a teacher still steeped in Marxist scientific ideas, writing in a popular rural newspaper.

RURAL LITERACY TRAINING PROJECTS

Operational Objectives for 1993-1995

- Abandoning the idea that only rural schools can provide literacy training; they have neither the material resources nor the teachers for formal adult education. The schools' objectives are to prevent functional illiteracy and to take on their still important role in the development of rural communities. They must also recognize their failures and the serious impact of functional illiteracy on the culture and way of life of these communities;

- discovering community-based methods and non-governmental agencies to launch some literacy projects; promoting the idea of local partnership and decentralization, encouraging development initiatives and organizing inter-regional networks;

- producing tools to raise awareness of functional illiteracy in Romania (the evaluation of this phenomenon is still being investigated), with a positive, completely non-aggressive presentation; we intend to use mainly local media to disseminate popular data;

- making use of projects and programs established by other agencies for the education of women, youth, training and requalifying the unemployed in order to combine the objectives of those programs with literacy training programs;

- enlarging the field of literacy training to include cultural minorities (Hungarian, German, Romany and so on), by taking advantage of their concern for the development of modern languages as well as of their own culture, although, at

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the moment, this is a rather delicate issue.

Expected Results

- Changing the peasants themselves (whom we consider the main players in efforts toward village cultural development) by changing their mentality, role and attitudes toward community problems;
- changing the attitude of local decision-makers toward development solutions; their direct participation in the development;
- mobilizing material and human resources, educational institutions and, in particular, cultural institutions for the development of their communities; restoration of cultural centres and rural libraries; creation of a rural university;
- introducing rural inhabitants to the new roles they will have to play on their community scene.

Some Methodological Points

We are trying to involve the whole group of individuals, institutions and rural communities in our projects, even though our programs are based on individual attitude and behaviour; therefore:

- achievement of change in the new role they will have to play will be through learning or re-learning how to participate and be creative, tools they can use in their personal life, in their work life and in their community;
- occupational, social, political and cultural preparation will be through various activities:
  - occupational (knitting, sewing, crafts, ceramics);
  - social and political (meetings on the theme of civic education, developing associations for helping large families and so on);
  - cultural (folk dance, naive art, popular costume exhibits, traditional folklore, lay or religious demonstrations).

The research units (for the proposed purposes) will be the historical regions of the country (Moldavia, Muntenia, Dobruja, Oltenia, Banat, Transylvania, Maramures and Bucovina) within which we will choose the administrative regions, communes and villages that are most culturally disadvantaged.

The methods selected will be more qualitative than statistical, but we plan to use data from the 1992 census and public opinion surveys, mainly through interviews, because we consider direct contact with the rural inhabitants very important.

Foreseeable Problems

- Functional illiteracy is not officially recognized in Romania as its most serious cultural problem with widespread implications.
- There is still a false view of development, facilitators and mass culture.
- Negative phenomena from the totalitarian society are still present in the form of blocks, mainly psychological where rural inhabitants are concerned.
- Material (financial) resources are lacking.
- Political and educational decisions about adult education (mainly those concerning basic education and continuing education) remain to be made.
- The idea of literacy training based in the school is still held; local initiative to develop cultural infrastructures and communication methods is lacking.

Projects in Progress

Found a Rural University

The project for developing a rural university is underway, initiated by the Bucharest Education Sciences Institute. Its goals:

- highlighting Romanian traditions with regard to rural universities and other similar undertakings elsewhere in the world;
- renewing traditional peasant involvement in popular medicine, agriculture, winegrowing and other fields;
- utilizing human resources in rural areas to prepare courses and inviting rural environment specialists to give courses on current topics;
- increasing awareness and appreciation for original folklore creations and specific techniques (for weaving carpets, pottery, naive painting and so on) in order to restore specific peasant occupations and traditions.

Functional literacy training is implicit (an introductory module exists entitled "general culture"), but we have at least made contact with the project coordinator.

Romanian and foreign non-governmental agencies have been involved in obtaining material resources for the project with the goal of the university being self-financing.

(Details about the project and further information may be obtained from Alexandru Darie, Education Sciences Institute, 37 str. Stirbei Voda, Bucharest, Facsimile: (40) (1) 312-1447.)

Evaluate Material Resources & Produce Material for Literacy Awareness

We plan to launch a program to evaluate the human and material resources in

rural areas, involving local decision-makers who will themselves participate in raising awareness of the rural crisis. We also plan to develop some tools for creating awareness, which will be prepared based on the results of the survey and direct discussions with potential partners in literacy training programs. Copies will be produced in volume and distributed in all regions of the country. The material will be circulated for critical review to those who participated in conducting the survey.

We wish to establish a national network of facilitators for rural areas and documents for their work. We expect to have to start from a real (informal) base to set up future literacy training programs, and we will need local support for the process in terms of its partners, the kind of documents, interests, needs, the real situation in cultural institutions and so on.

(Further information may be obtained from Florentina Anghel, Education Sciences Institute, same address as above.)

An Education Reform to Include Rural Areas

This is part of the education reform project in Romania which aims to introduce, through pilot centres for reform implementation, the main consultation programs for restructuring the education system. The pilot centres are not represented only by rural schools, but also by any institution that commits to joint projects with our Institute for direct participation in experimental research done on reform.

The objective of these centres is to involve the players themselves in preparing public opinion for the implementation of the proposed restructuring; thus the centres serve to multiply the objectives rather than simply apply results of research on the planned curriculum, administration and evaluation systems in an experimental fashion.

(Further information may be obtained from Cesar Birzea, Director, Education Sciences Institute, same address as above.)

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